
SECURITY ASSISTANCE COMMUNITY

International Military Training Solidifies Global Relationships

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Training is an integral part of the United States Army mission, and Fort Sam Houston units conduct a great amount of training. What makes this Army post's training mission even more unique is its international military training.

Every year hundreds of military and civilian students from more than seventy-five countries come to the Army Medical Department Center and School at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, to gain valuable training in their respective career fields.

Students' ranks vary from privates to general officers. Many of the students trained at Army Medical Department Center and School (AMEDDC&S) are now senior officers in highly ranked governmental positions in strategic countries.

"The new surgeon generals from Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as other key members of the international military medical community are among students trained at AMEDDC&S," said Oscar Ramos-Rivera, chief AMEDDC&S International Military Student Office.

The AMEDDC&S international training program falls under the Department of Defense Joint Security Assistance Training Program, which is designed to strengthen U.S. alliances globally and create new relationships with international partners. The international training is funded either through the foreign military sales (FMS), under which the country pays for training, or through international military education training (IMET) program for which the U.S. either pays or augments training costs with congressionally appropriated funds to support operations such as counter narcotics and counter terrorism.

"The Department of State and the Department of Defense execute this program to foster relationships with individual countries as part of our national security strategy," said Ramos-Rivera. "Our mission has allowed us to build and maintain skilled coalition partners and affords many future leaders the opportunity to understand our military values. The long-term effect will be for people to remain in contact with U.S. counterparts."

The AMEDDC&S mission is to train, sustain and evaluate U.S. and international military health care personnel of all Department of Defense branches and allied countries so they can ensure optimal health and readiness of America's military forces and its coalition partners anytime, anywhere.

"The world is getting much smaller today, so establishing relationships with other people in this small world is important," said William Lesjak, associate dean, Academy of Health Sciences. "We have the privilege of conducting medical training and give key leaders and troops of other countries the opportunity to experience our culture. In a war setting, established relationships and a common link are important."

U.S. Soldiers train alongside of old allies, Britain, Australia and Canada, as well as newly acquired friends from Kyrgyzstan, Slovenia, and Slovakia.

“My country is a young country, so we have to learn a lot,” and Kyrgyzstan Lieutenant Colonel Amanbay Matisakov, who is attending the AMEED Officer Advanced Course for Medical Logistics. “American Army and Soldiers have a lot of experience. The U.S. is the most modern and powerful Army in the world, so it is good to learn from them.”

While the students learn a great deal during their training at AMEDDC&S, they also contribute quite a bit to its mission. Many of the students are experts in their specialties. They are educators, publishers, instructors and deans of their respective countries’ military academics. Some conduct extensive research and have written articles for AMEDD Journal - a quarterly publication geared toward the medical community worldwide.

With two deployments to East Timor and the Salomon Islands, and having taught medical logistics courses in Australia, Captain Kate Elphick, a pharmacist, has shared with American Soldiers how Australians perform their job in Australia and in the field. “My course (health services materiel officers’ course) will give me skills to work in a coalition force,” said Elphick. “The purpose of my course is to experience the U.S. Army’s medical logistics system and to give me objectivity as a student and when making decisions back home or out in the field. Right now, it is a good time to be here because we have coalition forces in Iraq.”

Of more than 200 courses available at AMEDDC&S, 67 are offered to the international students. Most popular courses are combat medic, preventive medicine specialist and officer leadership courses.

“The preventive medicine training brings theory and practice together, and it will be invaluable when we are deployed,” said Sgt. 1st Class Sve Jagers, an occupational health nurse in the Royal Netherlands Air Force. “People over here have a lot of experience. One of my instructors is the instructor of the year. When we will deploy and will work with Americans, we will know what you do, so all preventive medicine experts will be able to work together.”

“I am here for the preventive medicine course because I may be going to my country’s Army Medical School to teach, so it is going to be a valuable tool,” said Korean Major Tackyu Hwang, an army orthopedic surgeon. “I am a clinician, and the function of clinical medicine is to maintain strength of the military, but preventive medicine is necessary nowadays because it helps prevent illnesses such as malaria, which is a big problem in South Korea.”

The U.S. Army deploys a great number of troops to South Korea annually. “I think by attending this course, I can also help my fellow U.S. classmates understand our culture and way of life should they come to Korea for a tour of duty or for assisting with a national emergency,” said Hwang. “We are exchanging quality knowledge.”

The foreign students are not the only ones benefiting from this interaction. These courses are a great opportunity for some U.S. soldiers who have never set foot outside the continental U.S. to become familiar with other cultures and gain indispensable skills for future assignments.

“It is good to interact with military members of other countries,” said Private Casey Cummings, Kansas National guard. “I am in class with a St. Lucian soldier. I am learning from him and becoming familiar with how things are done in St. Lucia should there be a tropical storm, for example, and we need to help.” “What I like is you get to interact with the international students while you are training instead of being in the real-world action and not understanding each others’ way of doing things,” said Pfc. Dawn Rossi, an operating room specialist with 28th Infantry, Johnstown, Pennsylvania, while in training with a Jamaican lab specialist. “We are learning their ways in their military.”

The annual student load has been going up since September 11, 2001 because of the Global War on Terrorism. “My training will enhance my skills and expose me to more sophisticated medical equipment,” said Captain Jupiter Dolloso, Philippines Army, attending an observation course for trauma surgeons. “Here I am exposed to field work and also to forward support group skills which

will also help me in my country in our ongoing fight against terrorist group, Aub Sayyaf, a militant group based in Southern Philippines which is linked to al Qaeda.”

The U.S. Army training at AMEDDC&S is vital to prevailing against forces and reaching out for a global partnership consistent with the center’s mission to “conserve fighting strength.” “Training in the medical arena plays a key role in the Global War on Terrorism and provides common levels of skills from basic to advanced,” said Lesjak. “Whether it is helping a mother give birth in a refugee tent, a sick child or a wounded soldier, regardless of nationality, proper medical training pays great dividends to the U.S. and its allies.”